

Step 1

My employee is experiencing stress.

Follow this step by step tool to help understand what may be causing the stress and what you may be able to do help.

You may find it helpful to print this document so you have everything to hand and can give the relevant pages to your employee.

The first step is to discuss the issues with your employee.

The following guidance will help you prepare.



My employee is suffering from stress

Understanding stress

'Stress is the feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure.' ([NHS – What is stress?](#)). Our jobs, relationships, family life, ill-health or money can all add to our levels of stress. Stress can affect how you feel, think, or behave and how your body works but we all experience it differently. Never ignore the signs of stress. Common indicators at work include marked changes in behaviour, increased sickness absence, poor timekeeping, or a drop in performance.

As a manager, you are in the best position both to notice and to help if someone you work with is suffering from stress and requires additional support.

Stress is best dealt with at an early stage; if staff feel they can approach you with issues as they occur, it will increase the likelihood of swift and more straightforward resolution of any difficulties.

Discuss the issues with your employee

Identifying the causes of stress (work or home) can usually be achieved through discussion with the individual.

It is a good idea to have an informal meeting away from your usual work place to put the individual at ease, prevent interruptions and ensure privacy ie avoid being distracted by your phone or computer.

Try to encourage open, honest communication to establish the extent to which the individual is feeling stressed and the possible cause(s) in a supportive context. Make sure you allow adequate time to talk as it can be unhelpful and off-putting to prematurely cut off a productive conversation.

Ask open questions and give the individual the time and opportunity to explain what they are experiencing. Example questions include:

- When did you first notice something had changed for you?
- When do you notice the impact most acutely?
- If a friend confided in you that they were experiencing a similar situation what would you recommend they do?

Allow the individual to finish each point before asking further follow-up questions. Don't interrupt as this will frustrate the individual and be aware of your non-verbal communication; look at the individual directly, nod occasionally and ensure your posture is open and inviting ie try to avoid folding your arms.

Avoid comparing their issues and circumstances to yourself or others. There is little to be gained by explaining that 'everyone else is managing' or that you are also feeling stressed. Stay focussed on the member of staff and what they are experiencing.

Help the person feel heard by reflecting on what has been said by paraphrasing eg 'what I am hearing is...' and 'it sounds like you are saying...'. You can also ask questions to clarify certain points eg 'What do you mean when you say...?'

If the stress is caused by personal issues

Your role is to support the individual. As a manager you may consider putting temporary adjustments in place to help the individual cope in the short-term. Adjustments might include relieving the individual of some work tasks, considering [leave in special circumstances](#), reduced hours, flexible start/ finish times, a temporary change of working environment, or referral to other sources of help.

The leaflet '[How to deal with stress](#)' provides contact details on a number of different support services available to staff.

Further advice on reasonable adjustments is available from your employee relations (ER) adviser.

If the stress is caused by work

As a manager, you have a legal responsibility for the health and safety of your staff which includes risks to their mental health caused by their work. Essentially once you are aware that a member of your staff is suffering from work-related stress that is the point at which you have a legal responsibility to do something about it ie providing help and support. A good starting point to learn more about work-related stress is the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) government guidance: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/what-to-do.htm>.

The [HSE Management Standards](#) define six primary sources of stress at work:

- **Demands** – issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment
- **Control** – how much say the person has in the way they do their work
- **Support** – encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
- **Relationships** – promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- **Role** – whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles
- **Change** – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated

Individual stress assessment (ISA)

If the stress is work-related, ask the individual to complete an Individual Stress Assessment (ISA) found in step 2, below. This asks questions based on the HSE Management Standards (see above) for identifying stress in the workplace. It will help the person pinpoint what is causing the feelings of stress so you can work together to put solutions in place.

This can be done either together or you can ask the individual to complete it on their own.

If the ISA has identified work-related stressors, it is important that action is taken. As a manager, you should consider the following questions:

- Can the stressors be removed or reduced? (be realistic)
- If not, what support can be given to the individual to help them cope?
- What resources are needed/ available to help?
- Are there HR policies, such as flexible working, that can be used in this case?
- What is the impact on others of any work adjustments?
- What follow-up actions/ checks are needed?
- Have my management practices had an impact on the situation? Are there things I can do better in the future to support my staff?

This table gives some examples of [common practices and support mechanisms](#) that may already be in place, or could be considered.

As a manager you may consider putting temporary adjustments in place to help the individual cope in the short-term whilst other steps are taken to remove or reduce the causes of stress.

Adjustments might include relieving the individual of some work tasks, considering [leave in special circumstances](#), reduced hours, flexible start/ finish times, a temporary change of working environment, or referral to other sources of help. The leaflet '[How to deal with stress](#)' provides contact details on a number of different support services available to staff.

If short-term adjustments are unlikely to resolve the situation you may need to consider longer-term alternatives. This may involve permanent redistribution of work tasks; introducing a different working pattern via the [flexible working procedure](#); work to improve team cohesion; mediation; or access to personal development training, coaching or mentoring.

Further advice on reasonable adjustments is available from your ER adviser.

Be careful not to over-promise on what you can deliver – manage the individual's expectations to ensure that they are realistic about what can be done, and what timescales might apply.

Stress management action plan

Once reasonable steps to minimise or remove the stressors have been agreed, they must be recorded, using a stress management action plan found in step 3, below. Actions should be reviewed regularly with the person until the situation is resolved or they are feeling better.

Referral to occupational health

Occupational health can advise on supportive measures which may help resolve difficulties with stress.

A referral to occupational health should always be considered, but may not always be necessary. Your ER adviser and if necessary the occupational health adviser may be able to assist with such decisions.

It is advisable that a referral to occupational health is made in the following circumstances:

- When the management relationship with the person has become difficult or broken down
- When the person is reporting as sick, particularly if the person has already been off work due to stress for two weeks or more
- Where there are other underlying health problems which may require additional consideration and support eg anxiety and depression which may have been triggered or exacerbated by stress.

Further information, including referral documentation, is available from [occupational health](#).

Step 2

Complete the following assessment which will help to identify possible stressors and what may be done to manage them.

It is recommended that either:

Provide the assessment to your employee to complete on their own

Or

Complete it together if your employee will find this most helpful.

Once it is completed, set aside some time to meet with your employee when you won't be interrupted and quality conversation can take place.

It is a good idea to book this time in advance so you both have a goal to work towards.



Individual stress assessment (ISA)

1. Demands: this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment

Aims (desired states)

- Staff have adequate and achievable demands
- Staff skills and abilities are matched to the job demands
- Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of staff
- Concerns about the work environment are addressed

Do different people at work demand things from you that are hard to combine?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Do you have unachievable deadlines?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Do you have to work very intensively?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Do you have to neglect some tasks because you have too much to do?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Are you unable to take sufficient breaks?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Do you feel pressured to work long hours?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Do you feel you have to work very fast?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Do you have unrealistic time pressures?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>

Q1 Please write in more detail about your concerns, for any questions you answered 'yes' in this section:

2. Control: How much say you have in the way you work

Aims (desired states)

- Staff have control over their pace of work
- Staff are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work
- Staff are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work
- Staff have a say over when breaks can be taken

Can you decide when to take a break?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Do you feel you have a say in your work speed?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Do you feel you have a choice in deciding how you do your work?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Do you feel you have a choice in deciding what you do at work?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>

Do you feel you have some say over the way you do your work?

Yes No N/A

Do you feel your time could be flexible?

Yes No N/A

Q2. Please write in more detail about your concerns, for any questions you answered 'no' in this section:

3. Support: The support you receive from managers and colleagues.

Aims (desired states):

- Staff feel supported at work, and extra support is provided where the need is identified
- Staff receive regular and constructive feedback

Does your manager give you enough supportive feedback on the work you do?

Yes No N/A

Do you feel you can rely on your manager to help you with a work problem?

Yes No N/A

Do you feel you can talk to your manager about something that upset or annoyed you at work?

Yes No N/A

Do you feel your manager supports you through any emotionally demanding work?

Yes No N/A

Do you feel your manager encourages you enough at work?

Yes No N/A

Do you feel your colleagues would help you if work became difficult?

Yes No N/A

Do you get the help and support you need from colleagues?

Yes No N/A

Are your work colleagues willing to listen to your work-related problems?

Yes No N/A

Q3. Please write in more detail about your concerns, for any questions you answered 'no' in this section:

4. Relationships: promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

Aims (desired states):

- Staff feel able to ask for help with conflict, bullying and harassment
- Staff share information relevant to their work
- There are agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviours

Are you personally harassed, in the form of unkind words or behaviour?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Do you feel there is friction or anger between colleagues?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Are you bullied at work?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Are relationships strained at work?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>

Q4. Please write in more detail about your concerns, for any questions you answered 'yes' in this section:

5. Role: ensuring that your role is clear and that you have not have conflicting roles

Aims (desired states):

- Staff understand their roles and responsibilities
- Staff are able to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities

Are you clear about what is expected of you at work?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Do you know how to go about getting your job done?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Are you clear about what your duties and responsibilities are?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Are you clear about the goals and objectives of your ward/ department?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
Do you understand how your work fits into the overall aim of the organisation?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>

Q5. Please write in more detail about your concerns, for any questions you answered 'no' in this section:

6. Change: how organisational change is managed and communicated

Aims (desired states):

- Staff are provided with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for any proposed changes
- Staff are aware of timescales of proposed changes
- Staff are aware of any probable impact of any changes to their jobs
- Staff are supported during change and given additional training where required

Do you have enough opportunities to question managers about change at work?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>	N/A <input type="radio"/>
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- Do you feel consulted about change at work? Yes No N/A
- When changes are made at work, are you clear about how they will work out in practice? Yes No N/A
- Is there anything else that is a source of stress for you, at work or at home that may be contributing to work-related stress? Yes No N/A

Please write in more detail about your concerns, for any questions you answered 'no' in this section:

Date this assessment was completed:

Thank you for completing this form.

Your manager will discuss the results of the assessment with you and develop an action plan to address the key areas of concern identified.

Step 3

Having worked through the assessment it is now time to discuss what it has highlighted with your employee.

The following plan should be completed having had quality time to look at the assessment and listen to your employee.

Try not to jump to completing the plan until you've been through the assessment together.

Now, complete the following action plan template together.



Individual stress management action plan

Name of individual		Job title	
Manager name		Job title	
Ward/ department		Division	
Date action plan developed			

No	Recommendation	Responsibility (who by)	Target date (when by)	Progress/comments	Completed date
<i>Example</i>	<i>Together we will review your 'to do' list regularly over the next two weeks and prioritise tasks together</i>	<i>Both of us (manager and employee)</i>	<i>Immediately and over the next 14 days</i>	<i>We discussed how this recommendation has helped to reduce some of the feeling of being overwhelmed by conflicting demands. We've agreed that we will now move to jointly reviewing the 'to do' list weekly and monitor this over the next four weeks.</i>	<i>Continuing</i>
1					

2					
3					
4					

Add rows as required

Individual signature.....

Date

Manager signature

Date.....

Step 4

The final step is to **review how the action plan is going**. You will have set some target dates when you completed it.

Book some time with your employee again, when you won't be interrupted and you can listen carefully to how things have been since making the recommendations and agreeing actions.

Feel free, working together, to adjust the actions from last time if that would be helpful. Jot down any comments about progress and if there is anything new which has occurred.

You may need to arrange further review conversations.

